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THOMAS JEFFERSON AND MOLIERE

My colleague, Professor R. L. Rusk, has called my attention to a letter written by Thomas Jefferson to Dr. James Currie, and dated January the 18th, 1786, at Paris. After referring to the *Encyclopédie*, he adds:

"The medical part has not yet begun to appear, that author having chosen to publish the whole at once. I do not expect it will be the most valuable part of the work, for that science was demolished here by the blows of Molière, and in a nation so addicted to ridicule, I question if ever it rises under the weight while his comedies continue to be acted. It furnished the most striking proof I have ever seen in my life of the injury which ridicule is capable of doing."¹

It is interesting to note that 113 years after Molière's death Jefferson should be of the opinion that in France the practice of medicine had not recovered from the effects of the good-natured satire of the great comic writer.

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"SWEET, RELUCTANT, AMOROUS DELAY" AMONG SOME
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH POETS

To every generation certain lines from great or near-great poets become by-words. But the by-words of one generation are apt to differ from those of another. One line from Milton seems to have become a by-word to English poets in the latter eighteenth century, and since then has returned to the class of lines which are admired but not continually quoted. In *Paradise Lost* (Book iv, lines 310-311), Eve yields to Adam's domination with "coy submission, modest pride,"

And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.

Erasmus Darwin (*Temple of Nature*, Canto II, line 158) appropriates the entire line as it stands. Richard Payne Knight, in his didactic poem, *The Progress of Civil Society* (Book III, line 227), also appropriates it bodily, except for changing the "and" to "with." Neither writer acknowledges his source. Anna Seward, the Swan of Lichfield, imitates the line, in a letter to Miss Weston, 1787 (Miss Seward's *Correspondence*, Vol. I, page 264), as "sweet, reluctant, indolent delay," mentioning Milton in connection with it. William Collins echoes the line, though he does not appropriate it bodily, in his *Verses on a Paper which Contained a Piece of Bride-Cake given to the Author by a Lady* (line 19):

Reluctant pride, and amorous faint consent.

¹ *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, collected and edited by Paul Leicester Ford, Putnam's, New York, 1894, Vol. iv, pp. 132-133.

William Blake, too, echoes it (Rossetti mss. xxiii. Sampson edition of Blake's lyrical poems, page 172):

If an amorous delay
Clouds a sunshiny day—

Evidently, then, the line was common property to the poets of the time. Why the late eighteenth century used it more often than our present post-Victorian age does, is an interesting but perhaps somewhat nebulous subject for speculation.

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THE EVENING STAR IN MILTON

Regarding the difficulties in Milton's references to the evening star (*Comus*, 93-4 and *Lycidas* 30-31) I have the following suggestions to offer by way of supplement to Professor Emerson's authoritative discussions in *MLN.* xxxvii, 118 and *Anglia*, xxxix, 495.

In the *Comus* passage may not the phrase "top of Heaven" mean "the upper half of the celestial sphere" rather than "the zenith" or, as Professor Emerson understands it, simply "a high point in the sky"? Such an interpretation, besides making the passage astronomically accurate and being in accord with Milton's general habits of expression, gives a better poetic sense as well. *Hesperus* "holds" the entire visible Heavens as their sole lord.¹

In the expression "rose at evening" in *Lycidas* the verb is to be taken loosely in the sense of appear. Professor Emerson suggests the possibility of this interpretation but gives no supporting instances before Milton. Such instances are to be found in the classics, notably in Horace, *Odes*, II, ix:

Tu semper urges flebilibus modis
Mysten ademptum, nec tibi Vespero
Surgente decedunt amores
Nec rapidum fugiente solem.

The Latin usage was perhaps determined by the ambiguous sense of the Greek *ἀνέρχουμαι* ('rise,' 'return').² With the *Lycidas* pas-

¹Spenser in a passage cited by Emerson as containing the probable original of Milton's phrase presumably thought of the star as rising in the east and ascending towards the zenith (*F. Q.*, III, iv, 51; cf. *Epithalamion*, 285). Milton, who is on the whole conscientiously scientific even in poetry and whom another of Emerson's quotations shows to have been correctly informed regarding the phenomena (*P. L.* ix, 48-50), must consciously or unconsciously have corrected the image when he adopted the expression.

²In such a passage as Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, iv, 1629, ἀνὰ δ' ἤλυθεν ἀστὴρ αὐλῖος, cited by Emerson to illustrate the expression "folding star." This line is translated by Seaton (Loeb Classics) "and when the star returned that bids the shepherd fold."